

NTSB Most Wanted List

Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives.

Improve the Safety of Bus Operations



The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the Federal Government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.



**National
Transportation
Safety Board**

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Improve the Safety of Bus Operations

What is the issue?

Travel by buses is among the safest modes of transportation. However, because these vehicles carry a larger number of passengers, when something does go wrong, more people are at risk of injury or death. Bus safety is a multifaceted issue involving not just the vehicle, but also the drivers, bus and motorcoach operators, and oversight agencies.

In recent years, the national focus has been on adequately protecting bus occupants in a crash, which is critical to improving survival rates and avoiding injury during a crash. Much can be done, however, to decrease the likelihood of a crash in the first place. Through its investigations, the NTSB has found that the problem is often with the individual driver or company operations. The actions of impaired, distracted, or fatigued drivers have had catastrophic consequences. Additionally, bus operators continue to demonstrate unsafe operating practices, particularly those operators who have been placed out-of-service by oversight agencies and are then reincarnated under another name or with a new U.S. Department of Transportation number.

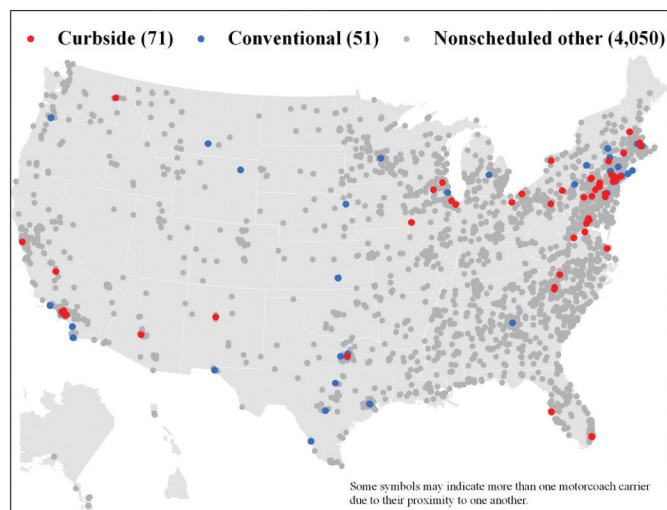
What can be done . . .

Bus operators require government authority, their drivers require professional driver's licenses, and their customers pay for service. As a result, bus passengers deserve and expect the highest level of safety. An important step in improving safety is to ensure that the professional motorcoach driver is qualified. For example, bus operators should review a longer, more comprehensive driving history during the recruitment/hiring process and use video event recorder information to assess on-the-job performance. In addition, drivers should undergo regular medical examinations by an authorized medical professional to ensure that they are fit to operate such complex machinery. Drivers and operators should also work together to limit hours of service to ensure that drivers have adequate opportunity for rest—and to institute measures, such as fatigue risk management programs and vehicle technologies, that can assist operators and drivers in recognizing and mitigating fatigue.

But there can be no guarantee that drivers are qualified unless their companies are held to a proper standard. New companies should be required to demonstrate their safety fitness before the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) grants authority to operate. When reviewing a company's ongoing operations, the FMCSA should place greater emphasis on vehicle and driver performance, which are disproportionately factors in accidents. And if the FMCSA determines that a company is not fit to continue operations, there should be methods for verifying that the company has ceased operating. Consumers can further reinforce these standards by doing business and contracting only with those bus operators that employ best practices and have the best safety records.

Statistics

Nationwide, 750 million passengers—12 million more people than the entire population of Europe—are transported by buses annually. Most travel to and from their destinations safely. Yet despite the strong safety record of buses, according to the FMCSA, 13,417 buses crashed in 2009, resulting in more than 250 fatalities and 20,000 injuries.



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